

Your Health: How to Talk to Your Doctor About Pain



An important part of managing your pain is keeping a pain diary. A pain diary is a place to record how you feel, what you are doing, and what helps you feel better.

Take your pain diary with you to the doctor. It will help you remember things, answer questions, and describe your pain.

Describe your pain

By describing your pain, you will help your doctor know how best to treat it. In your pain diary, keep track of the following:

- Where do you feel pain?
- What does it feel like? Sharp? Dull? Throbbing? Burning? Steady?
- How bad is your pain? Use a pain scale from 0 to 10. Zero means no pain. Ten means the pain is as bad as it can be. Give yourself a score between 0 and 10 to chart your pain.

- How long does the pain last? Does the pain have a pattern of when it comes and goes?
- What eases the pain? What makes it worse?
- Does the pain start suddenly or build up over time?
- Can you think of anything that starts or causes the pain?
- Do you have any other symptoms with the pain?
- What medicine do you take, and how much does it help?
- What pain medicine has worked for you in the past? What has not helped?

Get support

When you are in pain, you may have a hard time remembering what your doctor tells you. Bring a friend or family member to the doctor with you to help you understand and remember or write down what your doctor said.

Ask your doctor to give you written or printed information. Take notes or record the conversation. Ask your doctor to slow down or repeat information when you need more time to write it down. Later, you can review the information whenever you need to.

Be open and honest

It is important to be open and honest with your doctor about your pain.

If you do not feel like you can talk with your doctor, there may be things you can do to improve communication. Think through your concerns. State them as honestly and openly as you can. You may want to use one of these opening statements:

- "I am concerned that we are not communicating well, and here's why . . ."

- "I need to be able to talk with you about _____, and I am having trouble getting started. Can we talk about this?"
- "I realize that you are very busy, but I really need to talk about _____ at more length. Can we schedule a time to do that?"
- "I am having trouble understanding _____. Can you help me?"
- "I want to be a partner with you and tell you everything that is bothering me so you can understand and help me."

When to call your doctor

Call your doctor immediately if you cannot control your pain with medicine or **one** of the following happens:

- You have a headache with vomiting.
- You have a fever with chills.
- You have sudden pain in your arm, leg, or back.
- You faint.
- You have hives, severe itching, or shortness of breath.
- You cannot move a limb.
- You can't pass stool or urine.
- You are confused.